

NOTES FROM THE *Underground*

Ottawa, Canada

Vol. 4 No. 6 November/December 1992



INSIDE

Karen in Scarborough

**Myths and Realities of
Perversion**

**Plus
Arts & Entertainment
Short Notes
World Watch
The Back Page.**

Book Information

Two advertisements for books found their way to my desk the past month. Herewith a summary:

In Female Disguise by Peter Farrer. This book is an anthology of "literature's treasury of men who for reasons of one kind or another find it necessary to disguise themselves as females." This collection is compiled by the same person who brought us *Men in Petticoats*, the small but interesting selection of letters from Victorian newspapers from male readers extolling the virtues of women's clothes. (we have a copy in our library.) The contents of *In Female Disguise* include extracts from books, as well as complete stories by such authors as Thomas Mallory, Daniel Defoe, Jane Austen, Mark Twain, Arthur Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling. A tad pricey at current exchange rates for the British pound, but no doubt a pleasant literary relief from typical mind-numbing TV fantasy. Paper, 360 pages, 3 colour plates and numerous black and white illustrations for 15 pounds. Available post free from the publisher: Karn Publications Garston, 63 Salisbury Road, Garston, Liverpool L19 0PH, England.

Feelings: A Transsexual's Explanation of a Baffling Condition by Stephanie Castle. The flyer for this book is a replica of the cover, with the description of the book inside. "Too often the mysterious condition of transsexualism is viewed with distaste, suspicion, and in some instances is treated with outright condemnation. But as the author explains it is a non-communicable condition, which according to the best understanding available today, has a biological root originating in the womb, and a psychological presence upon which treatment hinges. In effect it is as much a disease as cancer whose origins are only now being unfolded and starting to be understood." Hmmm. I will it leave to transsexuals to decide how they like being called "dis-eased". The cover art is by Vancouver portrait artist Barbara Hammond and in this context is typical, stereotyped femininity with a picture of a beautiful woman wearing a loose white blouse, one shoulder bare, and holding - what else? - a rose. "The author explains many things based on her own personal experiences and those of others. She seeks to clearly define the condition, and differentiate it from other sexual disorders." Another hmmm. I wonder if one of those "disorders" might be transvestism? "She gives much practical advice on 'do's and don'ts", and seeks to help others through the jungle of their lives, which this condition, when misunderstood and untreated can create." All enquiries to: Perceptions Press, Box 46, 8415 Granville Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6P 4Z9. The list price for this book in Canada is \$24.95, plus postage \$1.00 and the dreaded GST. For the USA, \$24.95 US plus \$1.00 US postage.

Christmas Dinner

This year's dinner will be held on Saturday, December 12th at Le Parmesan Restaurant on Boulevard St-Joseph in Hull at 8 PM. Please phone Gender Mosaic for more details.

Changes at N.F.T.U.

This is the last issue of Notes from the Underground I will be editing. We've come a long way from the first two page edition and I'd like to thank all the contributors over the years who have made it successful. We're a bitchin' bunch of crossdressers and I hope that never ends. I can assure you I would not have lasted four years if all you gave me to print was love and kisses and golly-gee-it's nice-to-be-a-girl crap. I've sometimes wondered if crossdressing was an anti-intellectual activity, but you've given me hope.

I'll finish with a quote by Marie Curie that I came across last week. "Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and, above all, confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something, and that this thing, at whatever cost, must be attained."

Thanks for your support.

Ted

Notes from the Underground

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Adventures

My dear friends,

It's been awhile since I've written you so I thought I'd drop you a note to let you know what's new. It seems as time goes on that Karen is playing a more dominant part of my life. I long for the day when I could be Karen full time, but alas that is not possible in my present circumstances. I think that in the not too distant future, I will have to make a decision about what really makes me happy.

On a recent business trip to Toronto, I was taking a subway from downtown to Scarborough when I saw a woman coming down the stairs to the platform. I spend a lot of time watching women, not only because I enjoy it, but mainly because I learn from them how to better present myself. Anyway, this woman was either a man or a very unfeminine, not too attractive woman. The point is, no matter how much I studied her I didn't know. Not only that, she really didn't seem to care how I or anyone else felt. I learned something from her. I wasn't going to let the fact that I may make someone else uncomfortable about how I look get in the way of something I enjoy. You see, I was already nervous about tomorrow because I was going to become Karen again for the whole day. Instead of fretting about it, I started to look forward to it. I somehow gained much confidence from watching the subway woman. She was to me, from that point forward, a beautiful woman in my eyes.

As I planned, Karen emerged the next morning from her hotel room brimming with confidence. I'm not going to bore you with details of what I was wearing, but I was dressed as a middle aged woman in blouse, skirt and high heels. I've gone out numerous times in Scarborough, so I have a few favourite haunts. I like the more fashionable places like Eatons instead of Woolco type stores. I find there are more places to hide if necessary. I still get a special thrill out of trying on women's shoes. It always surprises me that someone doesn't say something to me, but I guess to them it appears very ordinary to see a woman trying on a pair of shoes. I was also able to try on a few winter coats, which was equally thrilling.

I am a coffee drinker and as a result of being dressed, I usually deny myself that pleasure, not only because I am reluctant to go to a restaurant but because the usual urge to relieve myself comes shortly afterward. However, today I was feeling both confident and brave, so I decided that Karen was going to get a cup of coffee. I went up the escalator to the second floor where the Eatons coffee shop is. Very nervously, I took the cup and saucer and began filling it at the self serve machine. Wisely, I didn't fill it, because I had to hold on to the cup with one hand and the saucer with the other, I was shaking so much. As I approached the cash, I managed to calm down a little. I don't even remember how much she said it was. I just was overjoyed to be doing such a feminine thing as reaching into a purse to retrieve some money. As my eyes scanned the room for a table, I was also looking to see if anyone noticed me. I found a table in the corner that afforded me both a little protection and a quick exit. It was like a dream come true for me.

Here I was dressed as a woman, sitting in a restaurant drinking a coffee and no one seemed to mind or care. I'm not sure if I even tasted it or not, but there were so many things that reminded me of the mode that I was in. I have often seen coffee cups with lipstick on them, but this cup and this lipstick was mine. I even had a hard time deciding where I should put my purse while I drank my coffee. Though I hardly tasted it, it was the most enjoyable cup of coffee that either Karen or Rick has ever tasted.

The rest of my day was immensely enjoyable and went by without incident, although one humorous thing did occur. I was looking through the pantyhose in a Sears store when I felt that something was not quite right. I looked down at my blouse and to my horror discovered that my left breast form had somehow slipped out of its bra cup and had come to rest inside my blouse down by my belt. I tried discreetly to slip it back in place, but it was obviously going to require a washroom visit. Since my coffee had affected my T.B. condition (tiny bladder), it was necessary to visit the ladies room. I don't especially get a thrill out of being in a ladies washroom, but I would attract a lot less attention in there than I would in the men's room. I made my necessary adjustments, relieved myself and was ready to leave. As I walked by the mirror I stopped, took my brush out of my purse and adjusted some of my hair that had moved out of place. When I finished that, I noticed that my lipstick needed touching up so I took care of that. These two tasks did give me a special thrill because beside me were other women doing the very same thing. I have never felt more feminine and accepted as I did at that moment.

Returning to my hotel, I decided that tonight I was going to dress down. Every time I have been out in public, I have been "dressed to the nines". But since I was feeling confident, I decided I was going to be a casual woman tonight. I wore a nice, plain white sweater along with a denim skirt that was a little shorter than I was used to. Slipping on a pair of flats, I felt funny walking to the car. Unless I looked down at what I was wearing, the only thing that reminded me that I was a woman was the swinging of my purse. I had always derived great pleasure out of wearing high heels, yet here I was wearing shoes that were as flat as my hated male shoes and I was enjoying it immensely. I went to a Woolco store and tried on various pairs of shoes of all different heights. It was fun dressing down and for some reason I felt much more relaxed. I have always liked the look of high heels with jeans so the next time I go casual I think that is what I'll do, although I admit that I much prefer dresses and skirts to pants of any kind.

It's time to say goodbye, but I would like to say something about my two days as Karen...I was happy! I felt good! Not only while I was dressed, but also after. My wife even commented on how nice it was to have me in such a good mood. The happy feeling lasted several days, but did wear off. It appears that Karen must make an appearance very shortly in order to bring that happy feeling back.

Karen Gaston

Extraordinary show portrays women as good or evil

BY NANCY BAELE

Citizen art writer

Women. They are shown as virgins, saints, mothers, wives, temptresses and seducers in an extraordinary show that opens Friday at the National Gallery.

Eva/Ave: Woman in Renaissance and Baroque Prints was organized by H. Diane Russell, Curator of Old Master Prints at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. She selected 140 works from the National Gallery collection for a thematic exhibition on how women were portrayed by artists in northern and southern Europe from the 15th to 17th centuries. It was shown in Washington a year ago and was remounted for Ottawa, its only other showing.

The exhibition is overwhelming because of the quality of the works and the content. There are rapes, murders, and always there is sexual tension between men and women.

"When I had taken the prints from the vaults, and looked closely at them, I was struck by the sexuality and the violent attitude they represented," Russell said during a preview of the exhibition.

"I kept asking myself if I was skewing the information they contained, but I think they represent a valid cross-section of this period."

What is noticeably lacking are images of women as friends — either with each other or with men. There is a notable exception, a Durer print of the Virgin giving birth. A community of women of all ages assist her, through the stages of her labor. It reflects a normal practice in the Nuremberg society Durer knew.

Despite the premise of the show, which comes from a study of gender and examination of images of woman as either the good and virtuous *Ave*, or her counterpart *Eva*, the evil temptress and seductress, there is nothing about it that smacks of revisionist rhetoric. It is as instructive about male power and the way men are portrayed as it is about the female.

Rembrandt is the artist who outstrips everyone, who shows the fundamental sorrow at the heart of all knowledge and the sexual nature of knowledge. In his works — *Queen Esther*, *Adam and Eve*, *Mary and Jesus* — he achieves an equality between the sexes that is mysterious and profound.

His women are not conventionally beautiful, nor are



Rembrandt's Adam and Eve

his men. Their light and their power comes from within.

His image of the Virgin holding her child while Joseph looks sadly through the window at the maternal scene is hung near a Mantegna etching of the same scene. Rembrandt borrowed heavily from Mantegna's *Virgin and Child*, in the composition. But Rembrandt's etching is stripped of everything except the essential human bond with all its imperfections and desires, the sense of belonging and being apart.

The exhibition makes clear how instrumental inexpensive and portable prints became in promoting a central vision of women and society. The two engravings at the exhibition entrance — Durer's *The Virgin and Child with the Monkey* and *Adam and Eve with the Infants Cain and Abel* by Robetta — show how heavily Durer influenced artists throughout Europe.

Robetta, an Italian, based his work on Durer's print and used the same pose for the Virgin and the same landscape, but the sensibility is southern. There is a looseness, an abandon, not found in the precise, solemn Durer nudes.

As well as the study of women, the prints are a study of the workings of the world. Almost all, with the exception of the miniature works by Beham showing individual saints, put women in a social and ideological context.

In the catalogue, Russell notes how ideology accommodated human pleasures. Explicit instructions were given for arousing a woman sexually because it was believed that she had to be in this state to conceive and give birth to a healthy child.

This is an exhibition that warrants many visits, for its beauty, for its surprises, for its thought. The exhibition continues until Jan. 10.

Source: The Ottawa Citizen

Exhibit

■ **Title:** *Eva/Ave: Women in Renaissance and Baroque Prints*

■ **Place:** National Gallery of Canada

■ **Dates:** Friday through Jan. 10

The Myths and Realities of Perversion

by Belinda Doree

PROLOGUE - IMPORTANT MOMENTS IN HUMAN SEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

Significant Moment #1 (as depicted in the movie "Quest for Fire")

Caveman accidentally puts out his tribe's fire. Weather forecast doesn't call for any lightning strikes. Tribe throws dunce out to look for another fire. Caveman meets Cavewoman. Caveman warms to the occasion. Cavewoman says to herself, "What a stupid Caveman". Cavewoman shows Caveman another way of doing things. Caveman is intrigued. Caveman is overwhelmed. The angles are different. It feels different. It actually feels good! What was once strictly an act of instinct, has now become a sensation of..... pleasure.

Significant Moment #2 (a couple of hundred thousand years later)

Caveman has learned to domesticate sheep. The sheep, glad to have found protection from predators, prove cooperative. For the first time Caveman has nothing to do. "What am I going to do?" Caveman mourns, "What am I going to do? Caveman has no purpose. Barring another Ice-Age, the continued existence of his species is assured, requiring only a few minutes of his time. In comparison with all the other male life-forms, Caveman has already fulfilled his Natural role in life. "What am I going to do?" Caveman looks around; well maybe he can improve on Nature, make things better for all Cavepeople. Caveman really did mean well. He starts asking "how" and "why" and with those first horribly wrong answers he starts to control his destiny. Caveman has started the process which will eventually lead to everything from space travel to medical cures to neckties to the Stealth Bomber. Caveman has started to think. Caveman has started to build a civilization. Caveman has found a Purpose, something he can create and say, "That's my baby!" Caveman has become Man. As Man now surveys the stars with a new gleam in his eyes, he grudgingly admits that they are out of reach.... for now. At that very instant, the male species of the most intelligent life-form in the observable universe, begins to think of more immediate pleasures. The sheep grow nervous again

THE MYTHS AND REALITIES OF PERVERSION

"It constantly amazes me how many people are into bondage!"

Ann Landers, November 1987

"If there is to be a brave new world, this generation is going to have the hardest time living in it."

Gorkan, Chancellor of the Klingon High Command

The outside world tends to see us as one general mass of "behaviour". We, of course, know different. We have created battalions of acronyms and terms to describe all the different types of crossdressers and where they fit in the spectrum of gender expression. I would like to take a bit of time to discuss an aspect that is common to a number of crossdressers: fetishistic sexuality. I, being a "bondage queen", have felt very fortunate in that the clubs I have been a member of, have had a very *laissez-faire* attitude towards the whole thing. At the least it's never been openly held against me, and that is something that is much appreciated. If anything this has allowed me to concentrate on the gender side of things.

I have the feeling though, that in the gender community as a whole, the topic of fetishistic sex makes people very uneasy, and gets treated like some unsavoury family secret. Now in case you have not noticed, a lot of TV's are kinky! Yet despite their obvious prevalence in the world of crossdressing, this phenomena doesn't get a lot of attention in mainstream publishing circles. I must admit I find it slightly galling, and highly ironic when representatives from I.F.G.E's Speaker's Bureau relegate us to some numerically non-significant "sub-culture" out on the fringe. Beyond the pot calling the kettle black, this sentiment creates lines of division, where none should exist. I believe this keeps many fetishists from becoming aware that their crossdressing may be gender oriented, or at least enjoyable as an activity in itself. It may also be keeping their energy, talents, and formidable powers of imagination from joining crossdressing clubs.

SOME STANDARD RHETORIC

Can it be possible that the dynamic duo of fear and ignorance are again doing their merry work? Yet, as much as fetishistic TV's own confusion, and feelings of isolation recede as they educate themselves about, and express this aspect of their sexuality, so would those of the general public. Some people would be in for some startling revelations, if they could only remember their own admonishments to remain "open-minded".

First and foremost, fetishists are people, individuals, not one dimensional husks of flesh. The fetish "community" is composed of men and women from every cultural, economic and educational background. They include people with every conceivable

sexual orientation, who fall along the whole spectrum of gender expression. All this, in itself, means little. I wish it were possible for people to look past the shells we show to society, and indeed past the pictures of men in wigs and women in leather with their whips, and into their souls. They would see that, in a proportion that is no different from "normal" society, we are people who value trust and friendship. We have similar needs to feel wanted and to be appreciated; similar fears of rejection and failure. We react like any people would when cornered into an environment of isolation. People would learn that many of us participate in and support the very institutions that would condemn us to ridicule, or worse. People would realize that burden has a much more negative influence on people than any torrid fantasy. People would discover that everything that is required for a rewarding relationship with taboo sex is exactly what is required for any relationship. Period.

GETTING DOWN TO SOME BRASS TACKS

Yes, we are talking about sex, kinky sex, variant sex, BIZARRE sex. Sex which is inundated with terms like bondage, B/D, S/M, D/S. Admittedly there are those who have some difficulty identifying with the exquisite world of passions that revolves around fetishistic sexuality. They especially get agitated over concepts like dominance and submission. The images and connotations these words evoke are described by phrases like, "subjugation", "coercion", "power abuse", "sexism" and "violence". Hardly a ready-made PR bonanza!

The unspectacular truth though, is that fetish, stripped of the culturally induced hysteria surrounding it, is nothing more than focused and ritualized eroticism. Now, when building eroticism of any kind, whether in a bedroom or a dungeon, it only makes sense that the participants not turn this into a battle of egos. It's like two people trying to drive the car at the same time; which is what some pie-in-the-sky therapists are actually trying to sell. Worse than in politics, all this tends to obscure the original intentions of the exercise.

Dominance and submission, properly understood, and ethically applied, has absolutely nothing to do with someone's "superiority" over someone else. It has everything to do with who is offering the menu, and who is sampling the dishes; who drives and who gets to enjoy the scenery.

To the dominant, lies the task of setting up the scene, and orchestrating the role-playing. The master/mistress sets the pace, tone, atmosphere and guides the submissive through their fantasy world. Although usually armed with a "script" of some kind, they also have available several "surprises", ready to be spontaneously inserted, depending on the reactions of their partner. The responsible dominant pays constant attention to their charges,

aware of every nuance, ready to act (or not) as to increase their enjoyment. In fact, the true dominant really finds pleasure only when their "slaves" or "maids" are absolutely drunk with ecstasy.

The submissive, having none of these responsibilities, is thus free to let go of rational concerns and totally concentrate on, absorb, and enjoy the eroticism which has been generated. If it was really relevant, I could argue quite convincingly on a play of words, that in terms of sexual enjoyment, it is the submissive who is being "served" by the dominant. They are the ones who get all the attention. It is the submissive who tells the dominant what items should appear on the menu, which ones should be served, and in what order. It's almost imperious when you think about it. It is more than slightly illuminating to consider that it is the submissive who is often the "selfish and demanding" one of the pair. You haven't lived until you have seen two stubborn mules pouting at each other in sexual frustration, both adamantly declaring that it's their turn to be tied up and ravished.

Of course sex is an interactive activity. A submissive can knowingly react in a manner that is pleasurable to the dominant. In fact the whole spectrum can be traversed and experienced to the point where the submissive is totally and willingly devoted to the desires of the dominant, and yet totally derive their own pleasure, physical, visual and psychological, from that.

One quickly gets bogged down trying to list all of the variations and subtleties which can be incorporated, especially when one includes the delicious possibilities involved in role reversals. Suffice it to say that the interaction between the dominant and submissive is a very dynamic, creative process, which cannot even begin to be described by a simple picture of someone on their knees, or some simple catch-phrase.

A QUICK SIDE BLURB ON 'OBJECTIFICATION'

In the world of fetish, to objectify someone is to make them the centre of your existence. Your capacity for absorption, empathy, awareness, conceptualization is totally concentrated on the person in front of you. To be objectified is to be desired completely, without reservation. It is a primordial state of mind where you are totally cocooned in mental and physical sensation; all your cultural protective shells have been discarded. The submissives, if they can pull the right switches, find themselves in such a state of focus, where every stimulus, even as minute as the tone of someone's voice is eroticized. Hell even the lack of stimulus adds to the state of eroticism they are feeling. It is a self-perpetuating loop of ever increasing sensation. In plain English, you go bonkers, and you keep wallowing in ecstasy until physical and mental fatigue itself intrudes on your consciousness. One can imagine what women,

with their capacity for multiple orgasms, can go through. I can tell you however, that even male fetishists discover that there is a big difference between "orgasm" and "ejaculation".

Concerned citizens yelp about objectification, but it happens all the time. Sure it does! Next time you're with your lover and he/she is going "bonkers", take that exact opportunity to stop and ask, "Oh Dear, by the way, what you think of me as a person?"

Because people are not aware of this process of objectification, they often depersonalize their partner without their consent or when their partner is looking for intimacy and affection vice the sparks and lightning bolts. Soon after is when utensils are turned into projectiles.

EXTRAPOLATIONS

It is very important to realize that these processes can and, do apply to "traditional" forms of sexual endeavour as well. A husband sending the kids away and arranging a weekend in a penthouse suite with his wife. The wife greeting hubby at the door in lingerie on his birthday, and orchestrating a fun-filled evening of delights. Lovers arriving separately at a bar and pretending to pick each other up for the first time. In everything from flirting to foreplay to intercourse, the full spectrum of dominance and submission can be experimented with, and explored. In fact one can go through the whole checklist of terms used in fetishism, from ritual, to discipline, to punishment, to fantasy, to role playing, to sensory manipulation, to sexual transcendence to the stretched arched bodies, to the sense of overcoming resistance, and see that there is not one single aspect of fetishistic sexuality that does not have its parallel with traditional sexuality, and vice versa! They may be called by different, less intimidating names, ("active", "passive" for example) but all are techniques to build erotic tension and intensify physical sensation. The only true differences are those of surface application and personal need.

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE...BUT IT HAS COMPLICATED THINGS

Of course people's tastes and/or needs vary; some women like having their nipples nibbled on, some don't. What is gentle stroking for one man, is harpooning to another. What is a playful swat to one, is a flogging to the other. Some people feel very uncomfortable playing the dominant role, while others go catatonic when trying to play the submissive. This, if anything, only emphasizes the need for communication between partners. As much as one does not go into a restaurant for the first time, and yell "Supper!" and expect to get their favourite meal; one would expect the same would apply to something as potentially varied as sex.

The stimulation of all of one's senses in sexual activity is subject to an astronomical diversity of variation, nuance and levels of intensity. Has it ever occurred to people who denounce other people's sexuality that a lot of people simply would not like their tastes in sex? Mutually satisfying sex, especially over a long term, requires honest communication, trust and friendship. These are elements that can only spill over and help all aspects of a relationship. It is these elements which should be stressed and judged. Everything else is cultural boondoggle; self-centred agendas whose only end result has been to make it harder for people to find compatible partners.

Sex is too often regarded as the great divider between men and women. It does not have to be that way. A major problem lies in the fact that every self-proclaimed do-gooder from the Pope on down, has tried to standardize sex like so many metric nuts and bolts. These respected pillars of the community do society no more good than mentally deficient zombies trying to squeeze square pegs into round slots. If one extrapolates this incredible desire for sexual uniformity to subjects such as religion, skin colour, culture and language, (and hey let's throw in gender expression) one can get a feeling for its destructive potential. There have been such stigmas and taboos placed on sexuality that even married couples, and people who are about to be married, are often afraid to truly discuss their sexual needs with each other. They "take a chance" and hope it works out. I wonder how many people have had to fight loneliness, and fears of rejection, because their sexual tastes/orientation did not match some fictional "norm".

An insidious barrier that can crop up between the "camps" of fetish and straights is that of contempt. We must recognize contempt as a liar's method to find self-worth. I am sure that people could wear out Rogel's Thesaurus creating novel insults for each other. One side can see the other as sexually dysfunctional perverts in need of an armada of masturbatory aids. Then there are fetishists who, in turn, see these people as pretentious, unsophisticated ice-age rubes whose sexual awareness and knowledge are as advanced as hairy Neanderthals rutting in the mud. Simple minded brutes who have not sorted out the difference between feeding... and dining.

Labels and stereotypes are crutches for the mind. They save people from thinking strenuously; they obviously don't spare them the arduous task of judging. Even positive stereotypes act to "define" and restrict people in their options, which in turn lay the seeds for conflict. A couple who practices the wildest of the "exotic arts" should not feel contempt towards a couple that finds mutual sexual happiness by simply holding and caressing each other. In reverse that couple should not see the other's use of ritual and fantasy as a sure sign of inferiority.

In fact both should be willing to learn from the other. For this to happen, each must understand the variety that sexuality can have and feel totally at ease with where they fit. There must be a level of understanding that allows for the true respecting of individual rights, not something that would only work in some neatly cloned version of Happy Days.

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE DYNAMICS OF POWER IN SEX

The idyllic picture in my mind of the women's movement has always been one of empowerment. A movement in which women allow themselves the ability to be who or what their individual desires and capabilities allow, and not let their gender arbitrarily keep them from achieving that.

What with the emphasis on restraints, paddles, dominance and submission, most feminists have understandably taken a dim view of fetishistic sexuality. Hell, just mention a scenario where the woman gets kidnapped and bundled off to some dungeon in Suburbia and you can hear Molly Hatchet clones revving up their axe sharpeners. Understandable, but unfortunate, for I feel they have jumped to a simplistic view on the role of power in sex, and have confused it with empowerment. I do not want to turn biological urges into esoteric mystical rumblings, but sex is a transference of energy; it is power. The only form of sex that I know of that doesn't have the use of power, is masturbation. In fetish there is a conscious use of power; it is a channel through which erotic energy is carried. True fetishists have, at the least, an intrinsic gut feel for this. Indeed, many often use this as the only channel through which energy is generated. Many submissive fantasies involve simply being put on display, being ravished decadently by their partner's eyes. The anticipation of physical contact, not knowing when, or if, it's to come can provide for hours of invigorating sensation.

The fetish world does not confuse this with empowerment; indeed all the literature for dominants strongly stress the necessity of identifying the needs and desires of the submissive. It is common etiquette for both parties to agree on "safe words" to stop activity in case of any real duress. The issue of these code words are inviolate! To put that in perspective of traditional intercourse, it means if the woman says "stop" then the man stops, in mid-stroke. There is no such thing as a grey area for rape in fetish. In fact given the situations we find ourselves in, our attitude towards the subject can rival that of the most ardent feminist. Unlike most "normal" men we can actually glimpse, in a very small way, the fear a woman must feel when violated; indeed the apprehension any woman might feel when sleeping with a strange man who is physically larger and stronger.

In fetish "dominant" has always signified a role in sex. It has never been confused with a position of self-indulgent or culturally acceptable empowerment. In the fetish world there are no gender stereotypes in who plays the dominant role. Male and female are both equally viable as dominant or submissive. In fact conventional wisdom states that the best dominants are those who have had ample experience in the submissive role. Fetish etiquette strongly encourages that the dominant not make the submissive do something they themselves have not tried out. This is just not for reasons of safety; indeed for many dominants it is an act of self-interest. It is an empathy building exercise; a need to know, to be able to relate to what the submissive is feeling.

Let us compare all of this with the world of "normal" wholesome sex. Here the active or dominant role has been symbolized with empowerment. It has been politicized to the point where women whatever their likings, are being urged to take the dominating role in order to ensure empowerment. Many men, ingrained by biology and culture have never understood the proper use of power in enhancing the sexual experience. They've never been taught to understand that for a current to really be carried, you need a connection at both ends. Power instead of being a channel for eroticism, is instead being used in a very raw manner, physical and economic, to enforce their empowerment. It is sex without empathy. To compare this with the stylized role-play of fetish, is like comparing an arsonist who notices he likes the smell of burning wood, to someone burning incense.

It is no small thing to consider that many fetish couples, although they turn their rec rooms into castle dungeons and use each other as love slaves, have more plain fun, and treat each other with more respect and dignity than couples who are ironically normal in their sexual methods. No small thing indeed.

SO WHAT? - FACING THAT ARCH FIEND - THE CONCEPT OF 'NORMAL'

"Hey, wait just one minute! Let's back this up here! You skipped over the arm-binders, suspension crosses and nipple clamps (there is a lot to be said for hardware) pretty quick, didn't you?" the cynics charge. "Are you telling me people can get hurt?" Of course they can. It would be foolish to deny this. What must not be overlooked, is the fact that any sexual activity can cause damage when conducted irresponsibly, or by a neophyte. Usually, it is not the physical hurt that is the most serious. This is a simple fact that even our supposedly learned judges fail to grasp when letting rapists off the hook. "No permanent physical damage" they cite and pound their gavel with authority. The insertion of a broom handle up their unwilling poop chute would also lead to no permanent physical

damage. I would be curious though, on the sentence they would hand out then!

Sex though, is very much a psychological and emotional affair, not an academic one. Michelle Pfeiffer in a latex catsuit is not the product of a logical rational mind. It is one thing to sit back and lecture on how bondage can channel and amplify physical sensation; how it allows one to remain in constant muscular tension right up to the point of climax. It is quite another when you are all wrapped up in ribbon and tape and your eyes are bulging out of their sockets as some smiling vixen is dragging a fingernail along your panties. I mean, what would Aunt Milly think of you then? Mind-blowing sex is accompanied by sweat, grunts, and facial contortions that cannot be duplicated even in the most energetic drunken stupor. Sex, if anything, is irrational! It should therefore come as no surprise that people's reaction to other people's tastes in sex, particularly if graphically displayed, is not an intellectual one, but a gut response. I include myself. I remember at a fetish club meeting where they showed a gay S&M film. I lasted three minutes. "You mean people actually get off on this? You have got to be &*&S! kidding? Right?" You have to understand, I may have been dealt some unique cards, but deep down I am a veritable prude!

No permanent harm there. I also don't like spicy foods either. No, the real problems start when people start whipping out that piece de resistance, "It's not noorma... In a nerve wracking, vain, whiny voice no less.

How does one fight that? Is it worth the effort? Let's face it; people have been arguing over "norms" ever since our cave-dwelling ancestors figured out there was more than one way to skin a cat. These arguments have been rolling along for thousands of years picking up social inertia all along the way. You have all kinds of norms battling it out: statistical, cultural, religious, legal, and multiple combinations thereof. All with their own internal battles raging. Matters are not simplified by the fact that these norms constantly shift with time, and a half-hour's drive. It gets worse when the Councils of Uprighteous Arrogance assume that there is only a finite amount of "goodness" in the world. The only way to seize the moral high ground, is to denounce other norms as being immoral, or downright evil.

Apply the above phenomena to something simple, like interior decorating, or whether lesbians should wear lipstick, and you get a mess. Apply it to something like sex, and you get, well... I'm not too sure what you get, but it isn't pretty. The Gods of Hypocrisy run rampant. Weeping evangelists, and morality gendarmes leering through confiscated pornography, quickly come to mind. To me as soon as someone turns their nose up on how other people express themselves they might as well carry a big

sign around their necks stating, "I'M INSECURE. PLEASE BE LIKE ME SO I DON'T FEEL ALL ALONE. I NEED A LIFE."

FORMULATING A DIFFERENT LEVEL OF PREJUDICES AND BIASES

If it is the complexity of the human mind that has led to such a variety of sexual activity, can the human mind also sort out the ground rules governing that activity? As a matter of fact, I think this stew can be sorted out quite easily. If you took away all the egotism, the self-serving interests, the rhetoric, the hidden agendas, the misinformation, the terror, the guilt, and all the pseudo-Freudian pop psychology, you'll finally arrive at those norms that really count. In that any sexual activity between live human beings must be conducted on the basis of mutual consent, and mutual concern for their partners welfare and desires. The two must go together! One or the other doesn't cut it.

These are two norms, applied concurrently, which transcend all the variety that sexuality can have, and that have stood the test of time, place, culture and what have you. With respect to humanly created values they are absolutes, and cannot be refuted. If society's resources were concentrated on countering "deviancy" from those norms, a lot of the problems surrounding sexuality would be cleared up, very quickly, and to everyone's benefit. When both of these norms are adhered to, then "how" people decide to enjoy themselves becomes irrelevant. These are the norms which people should be judged on and discriminated against. When one of these norms get broken, it doesn't matter if the sex is homosexual, lesbian, kinky or a la Jerry Falwell; you then get something really ugly. You don't have to have a Phd in psychology to figure that one out.

People must realize what makes people "good" or "bad", is not how they secrete certain bodily fluids, but their values, ethics, and concept of morality, which have been imbedded by their parents, teachers and peers; and their intellectual capacity to use these in everyday life. You cannot judge people on the basis of only one surface criterium. To do so is no different than to judge people solely on the basis of gender, language or skin colour. It's called bigotry.

Of course one can apply this reasoning not just to sex but to every form of human interaction, and expression of individual self. Most people spend more time brushing their teeth than doing or feeling the things I have been writing about. Please also note that this did not even attempt to describe the interplay between simple eroticism and affection. Yet, perhaps because sexuality is such an inherently personal and thus emotional subject, it is an excellent medium through which to discover how people can

be more open-minded and tolerant over people's individuality. Especially if it's over things that they really can't do much about. We have all these special interest groups working to make the world a better place for themselves. I swear though that these people are so deep into justifying and rationalizing their own realities that they risk losing the ability to relate to other people. People are so polarized on their "cause" they'd vote for Saddam Hussein if he agreed with them. No shock then that politics and society sometime appear on the verge of degenerating into a giant finger-pointing exercise. Our hardest earned asset which we defend at the slightest provocation, our sense of individual self, gets used against us. We end up squabbling over the stupidest things. And I get this sickening feeling that the bad guys are laughing their heads off at us.

SOME BOTTOM LINES

Although the specific subject matter covered here may be a little unusual, the message I have tried to convey should sound familiar. Treating others as you would want them to treat you...we are all brothers...love your neighbour...are philosophies and moralities that have been around for a long while. People pay a lot of lip service to these ideas, but we don't seem to realize what they entail, how much empathy is required, or failing that, how much conditioned fear has to be overcome to really live by those precepts.

I have always seen crossdressers as being the nexus of so many segments of societies; male/female, gay/straight etc. etc. I've almost come to the conclusion that we transcend the limitations of language; that we should slow down pounding ourselves into a pulp trying to define ourselves, often at the risk of building our own prisons. Although our diversity presents us with obvious hurdles, it also provides incredible opportunities, for we are exposed to so many different ways and perspectives of looking at things. I don't think, as a community, it is to our benefit to ever pick "sides"; instead we should work as an agency to bring people together, and our own

community is a good place to start.

Nearly all people, although we won't admit it, have this unconscious aversion to being "open-minded" about things we cannot relate to. We must learn to overcome this instinctive fear.

We must learn to equate the word "different" with "opportunity". We do that by learning to think; to think independently, without bastardizing linguistic reference points into stereotypes, and dogma. We must realize that open minds are prerequisites to open hearts. We must prove that nothing is as detrimental to an individual, and subsequently society, than not allowing them to do things they do well simply on account of who they are. If we can do this within our own, I think we'll have something society in general will be interested in. In fact there's a bull market out there! If people resist this, then concepts like equality will never really be more than laws in a book, instead of an accepted fact of life. Of course that will also mean people like me will be considered to be paganistic, deviant, decadent witches, instead of just average joes trying to get by making lemonade with his lemons.

So be it. The spurs on my boots need sharpening anyways.

Flashdancer Jennifer Beals' dream role: Playing lesbian nun

JENNIFER BEALS shimmied into stardom in the 1983 hit, *Flashdance*. Now she wants to step into the role of a nun. "It would really be fun to play a lesbian nun," she says. "I say that seriously. It would be such a point of conflict," claims the actress, who says she thrives on conflict.

"I'm unstable. I have multiple personalities in me," she declares, "a tendency toward schizophrenia. I'm always changing moods."

"Despite appearances, I am not sexy," adds Jennifer, 28, who is co-starring as beautiful lawyer Perry Quinn in *2000 Malibu Road*. "I am truly a failed boy. I have always preferred jeans to black stockings."

"I played a male transvestite in a 1991 movie called *Sons*. While we were

making the film, I went to a lot of transvestite clubs and hung out with transvestites. The hardest part for me, particularly because I grew up around two brothers, was becoming more feminine. Transvestites take everything that's 'feminine' and jack it up to the 10th power, so every hand movement, every hip sway is very exaggerated."

She made the film with her husband, New York writer/director Alexander Rockwell.

Jennifer left Hollywood after *Flashdance* to finish her studies at Yale University. "I was 18," she says. "I didn't want to swim with the sharks, and I really wasn't equipped to live in Hollywood emotionally. I thought I could go back to acting when I got out of school, and it worked out that way."

It's time to don skirts, men told

Knight-Ridder Newspapers

Cross dressing — the topic is explored ad nauseam by Oprah, Phil, Sally and Joan.

Guess what? Now cross dressing is more than just fodder for the gabfest set.

It's the new fashion commandment.

The style oracles are urging women to raid men's closets for tailored suits and vests and beseeching men to pull off their pants and put on skirts or stirrup pants.

The menswear look in women's wear emanates from such fashion deities as Donna Karan and Ralph Lauren, who attached their star lapels to vests, pin-stripe suits, chalk-stripe skirts and other masculine-looking attire. The ensembles were worn with ties, fedoras and wingtips.

Now no woman is stylishly safe unless she looks like a man.

It is also Karan. Michael Kors. Andrew Fezza and a few other designers who are trying to turn guys into dolls.

Karan, the queen of women's wear, stepped into the menswear spotlight this season with suits, pants and sweaters made with luxurious fabrics mixed with Lycra.

For spring '93, Karan steps even farther into the woman's wardrobe with a sarong skirt for men. The skirt conveys "a feeling that men are loosening up," she said.

There were few retail takers for the skirt. But that didn't stop other menswear disciples from offering up such sacrifices to masculine pride as ski pants, tight-ribbed shirts, bodysuits and even catsuits for men.

So perhaps this is what the quest for gender equality has wrought. Not unisex. The order of the 1970s, but mixed-sex. Now a woman can hide her charms beneath a stiff business suit and a man can display his pumped-up chest with a ribbed Lycra shirt and show off his hairy legs with a sarong skirt.

And who cares about the limitations of such garments.

If women have had to struggle with bodysuits, why not let men learn for themselves why women stay in the bathroom so long when they are wearing one.

And if men have had to ponder the fabrications and tailoring details of their suits, then it's time women learned about such details as well.

And don't sweat it. Since the movements are happening concurrently, whether to cross dress or not is an equal opportunity fashion dilemma.

ANDROGYNOUS MYTH

Despite designers' efforts, clothes still gender-specific

Miles Socha
The Chicago Tribune Record

Avant-garde designer Rudi Gernreich's predictions of 1970 were correct, young men and women would have been wearing skirts and trousers interchangeably for at least the past decade and older men and women would long have favored boldly patterned unisex caftans.

But clothes are still gender-specific.

And curiously, whenever fashion has attempted to embrace androgyny, it has meant women adopting garments with masculine qualities.

That's again the case for summer 1992 and it will be increasingly so for next fall and winter. A bevy of designers have embraced menswear looks for women which run the gamut from traditional (shapely double-breasted grey suits, complete with silver silk ties by Ralph Lauren) to extreme (sexy gangster-style suits, rough-and-tumble leather and painted-on sideburns from Comptex).

Last popular in the early 1980s, when many working women adopted John Malloy's dress-for-success, dress-like-the-boss formula, menswear was bound to return to the fore.

Women's fashions have reached ridiculous extremes of femininity and sex appeal in recent years, from see-through tops and push-up bras to micro-miniskirts and stayup fishnet hose. Menswear is the perfect antidote to all that froth.

Key menswear cues are pantsuits, boyfriend jackets, white shirts, neckties and such classic menswear patterns as glen plaid and oxford stripes.

Yet most designers add some feminine dash to the menswear formula. New York's Donna Karan tosses a lace bustier under a banker's pinstripes; Parisian Karl Lagerfeld puts a tulle skirt under tight, white muscle shirts; New York's Calvin Klein does man-style suits in tender pastel shades.

This mix of female and male elements is intriguing, but it's hardly true androgyny.

In their book *Men and Women: Dressing the Part*, Claudia Brush Kidwell and Valerie Steele note that styles combining male and female characteristics have never been accepted by both sexes.

"Women have incorporated almost every conceivable



Avant-garde: Model in menswear

able masculine element into their dress, but for men to adopt potent feminine symbols raises questions about their masculinity," they write.

"Why is it more acceptable for women to copy men's clothing than for men to adopt women's clothing? Could it be, in part, because masculine symbols are valued more highly?"

An interesting question to ponder.

(Distributed by the SouthernStar Network.)



Farcus

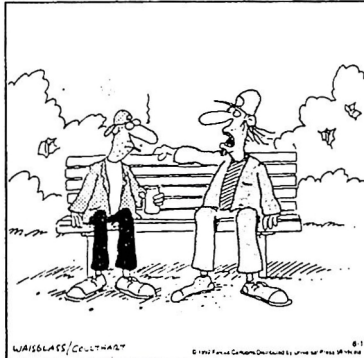
by David Waisglass
Gordon Coulthart



"Henderson, I think you misunderstood our dress code."

Farcus

by David Waisglass
Gordon Coulthart



"My accountant says I'm a rich man trapped in a poor man's body."